MUTINY!

A MONTHLY NEWSLETTER FROM BLACK FLAG SYDNEY

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Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge that the land on which we live, work, and organise is unceded Aboriginal land. We pay our respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, on whose lands Black Flag Sydney is based.

We offer our absolute and unequivocal solidarity to all First Nations peoples, here and overseas. We stand together now and always in the struggle for liberation, from colonialism, capitalism, and racism in all its forms.

EDITORIAL

The Black Flag rag returns! Welcome to the first print edition of Mutiny in nearly a year. The Covid-19 pandemic has hampered our efforts at disseminating this regular bundle of propaganda, but it has not stopped us from organising as best we can.

In relaunching Mutiny in print, we have taken the opportunity to expand, refine, and redesign the newsletter to be more comprehensive. In addition to the usual brief reports on our organising work, editions will now include pieces which analyse key questions faced by the left, as well as longer feature articles on the major campaigns we are engaged in.

With each edition, the social revolution draws ever nearer! We hope you enjoy this one, and we'll see you on the streets soon.

BLACK FLAG SYDNEY

Black Flag Sydney is a collective of anarchist-communist workers who organise mainly on unceded Gadigal land.

Our ultimate goal is to build a society free of states, classes and currency, in order to achieve collective self-emancipation and universal freedom for all. Direct action is our method and worker self-management is our vision for today and the future.

We aim not only to dismantle systems of capitalist exploitation, but to build the capacity for people to freely and truly self-manage their workplaces, communities, and lives.

FOLLOW US ONLINE

Mutiny is a monthly, worker run newsletter published by Black Flag Sydney.

We encourage you to share the ideas and words in this paper, and continue to build struggle wherever you are.

To subscribe to our online newsletter, or read full versions of all our articles, head to our website by scanning the QR code.

If you suspect you may be an anarchist, please send us an email at contact@blackflagsydney.com.

NSW NURSES STRIKE FOR BETTER PAY, RATIOS

A summary of the ongoing NSWNMA campaign.

On 15th February 2022, NSW Nurses and Midwives went on a 24-hour strike. Tensions between nurses and NSW Health have been building over the course of the pandemic, exacerbated by a wage freeze made by the NSW government in 2020 at the beginning of the period. NSW has been under a conservative coalition government for the entire period.

Nurses and midwives had a number of demands for the strike, including an improvement to ratios of nurses to patients – "1 to 4 on the floor, 1 to 3 in ED (emergency department)". Other demands included a pay rise of at least 2.5%, and a change to the law that required nurses and midwives to prove that they caught COVID at work in order to take their sick leave.

Thousands of nurses, midwives, and other workers in solidarity took to the streets of Sydney on the day of the strike, marching from Hyde Park to Parliament House, where they were met by a number of speakers. Other unions were present at the rally, with flags of the MUA, CFMEU, NSW Teachers' Federation, and the MEAA flying in the crowd.

At Parliament House the crowd listened to speeches from workers, detailing their experiences working in hospitals; these were heartwrenching. One nurse described how she was assaulted at work, leaving her in need of spinal surgery. She made clear that if proper ratios had been implemented on shift during her incident, she may have had more help dealing with the crisis. Another speaker told a heartbreaking story about how she always promised patients that they would not die alone, and that she or another nurse would always be there even if nobody else was. During the pandemic, with no visitors to the hospital and chronic understaffing, she was unable to fulfil her promise to one client in particular.

> "We live in a system that protects the interests of those who want to tighten the purse strings of our healthcare system at the cost of human lives; such an inhumane system must be destroyed."

In striking, the nurses' and midwives' union had defied an order from the IRC (Industrial Relations Commission) demanding them not to take industrial action on the day – an order sought by NSW Health. Defiance of this order was crucial; unions and workers cannot back down on sorely needed demands, especially during the pandemic. This came a few months after the NSW Teachers' Federation had defied the IRC in a similar fashion.

Such orders from the IRC make it clear to all workers that even in the most dire of situations, industrial regulation bodies do not rule in favour of what workers need, and what society generally needs to save lives. The IRC, Brad Hazzard, and NSW Health will do everything to hinder nurses' capacity to take care of us, and in doing so they prove to everyone exactly whose side they are on. We commend the NSW Nurses and Midwives for defying the order; we hope it will inspire other workers to challenge our restrictive industrial relations laws.

Thousands of people across the state and across the country have lost their lives and had their health damaged as a result of COVID-19 and the mismanagement of all levels of government. We live in a system that protects the interests of those who want to tighten the purse strings of our healthcare system at the cost of human lives; such an inhumane system must be destroyed. Strikes should occur whenever and wherever they are needed, on the workers' own terms, not the bosses' or the politicians'. We need workers in other industries to back up healthcare workers, too; if a solidarity strike was ever justified, it would be one taking place in defence of healthcare workers. Their work doesn't just affect the workers directly involved; it affects all of us.

Statement on Russia's invasion of Ukraine: No war but the class war

From the anarchist-communist groups of Australia.

(This is an abridged version. Please see our website for the full statement)

Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine is an extension of the human disaster that began many years ago – a product of years of political dictatorship, capitalist terror and geopolitical rivalries. It will predictably result in the deaths of many civilians, and the displacement of even more.

In some sense, this is a clash between two kinds of capitalist economy: the paternalistic, oligarchic, often state-driven economies of Russia and its neighbours, and the modern, market-driven, hyper-competitive economies of the "advanced" EU states.

We do not believe this is as simple as a clash between western liberalism and eastern dictatorship. Our opposition to the Russian bourgeoisie does not entail support for the western European one; as cases like Poland and Hungary show, countries can develop "democratically" towards authoritarianism under the aegis of the EU and NATO.

The growth of "fortress Europe", greatly inspired by Australia, that brutalises migrants with increasing severity, also demonstrates that liberal democracy and authoritarianism are not opposites, but joint partners.

The main response to this warmongering should not be either apologia for Russia imperialism or support for NATO, or even "national defence" within Ukraine. Rather, we support a renewed effort to bring together workers across national boundaries, supporting all forms of revolt that challenge their respective systems: mutinies, desertions, strikes, sabotage, demonstrations.

For those of us in Australia, we have some basic tasks:

• **To fight against the warmongering of our own side**, and against the hypocritical condemnations of Russia by the same politicians who drove the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan – in particular, we should do all that is possible to prevent even more nations from intervening, which would risk the possibility of the war spiralling into a larger, even more disastrous global conflict;

• **To undertake meaningful acts of solidarity with the working classes of Ukraine and Russia**, who are the primary victims of the war, and with protestors against it in both countries;

• **To spread information among workers here** regarding the working conditions of those in Russia and Ukraine, and the ways they fight back against the war economy and the restrictions on liberties that inevitably come from it;

• **To support the free, safe flow of migrants from the conflict,** demanding that Australia end its brutal border policies and grant refugees permanent protection, regardless of how they arrived;

• **To work, as always, for the union of workers across national boundaries**, fighting for the only thing that can put an end to all wars: the social revolution.

The war is truly horrendous, but like all other capitalist crises, it contains the potential to trigger the kinds of social uprisings that overthrow entire regimes. A century ago Russia participated in a disastrous, bloody war. It ended with a working-class revolution that sent shockwaves across the entire world. It is up to the international working class to make sure that this current war will end in the same way.

Pinkwashing Pride

Reclaiming Mardi Gras one protest at a time

The early hours in the days after Mardi Gras are usually coloured with a mixture of joy and regret as we slowly wash away the glitter that relentlessly clings to our bodies, and cleanse ourselves from hangovers, come downs, and reflect upon the people we danced with and more. Increasingly this occurs in a corporate context as the big end of town has slowly privatised the act of having fun such that you cannot inhale without breathing in the scent of dirty money from whichever sponsor has decided it owns your celebration.

But while Mardi Gras is a celebration, it is also far more than that. The advance of capital into the artistic and cultural sphere is egregious - the idea that the boss takes our week for week and then commodifies our leisure on the weekend is infuriating - but Mardi Gras' history as a protest ensures there's another layer to the issue. It means that this is not just corporatisation, but pinkwashing.

Mardi Gras began as a commemoration of the Stonewall Riots, and swiftly blew out into a struggle against the police and the corporate media for control over our bodies, our lives, and our public space. Protesters were detained, brutalised, outed in the media, and lost their jobs for making a stand. Now we have a parade under corporate yoke that lends this progressive branding to rehabilitating the branding of the police, the Liberal party, and every capitalist firm who prances in the parade.

Faced with the Covid-19 pandemic the board of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras (SGLMG) reacted like every capitalist - by further privatising it. The parade left Oxford Street and contained itself to a ticketed event in the stadium, with minimal covid safety, whereby people could walk around in a circle on the grass for 45 seconds a float while those who could afford to pay for a ticket watched on passively as politics was 'not allowed'. And of course, revenue went up and up and up.

The community response to this was sharp, and radicals intervened by taking over Oxford Street for two years in a row with the largest queer rights protests in Sydney since the Yes campaign. 2021 offered the challenge of a court case from the police who attempted to shut it down, and retaliation from the corporate controlled board of SGLMG who torched their own constitution by standing down board members who supported the protest. 2022 offered its own challenges with torrential rain in the lead up, and right wing threats of expulsion and litigation over the protest. But both times these challenges were overcome for a lively protest on Oxford Street.

This was particularly timely given that the Liberal party - the parliamentary wing of the bosses - have been trying to inflame a culture war against trans people. In the lead up to the most recent Mardi Gras march the federal Liberal party threw itself into a fresh attempt at legislating the right to sack and vilify queer people via the so-called Religious Discrimination Bill, meanwhile reactionaries in state parliament wanted to force teachers to out trans children. As an added bonus for the bigots, there is also a bill coming to exclude trans people from sports.

These are reprehensible attacks that the corporate aligned NGOs - Equality Australia (EA), SGLMG etc. - have facilitated by attempting to quash a protest response whether by gagging their own AGMs or lying to organisations that the bills could never pass. The Labor party leadership have gone even further by voting up the bill, and then investing in an organised disinformation campaign to persuade queer people amongst their support base that the bill is dead (supposedly at their hand) while also pledging to religious bodies that they would resuscitate it.

It is vital that this protest response, and the break away from the corporate orthodoxy of SGLMG and EA, continue on from Mardi Gras weekend. We drew a line in the sand, and took joy in protest before we celebrated but this is not the end. We cannot let silence in the face of oppression be the regret that we take away from our time of pride.

ORGANISE!

A REFLECTION ON THE CLIMATE JUSTICE MOVEMENT FROM THE STUDENT CAUCUS OF BLACK FLAG SYDNEY

If the modern student movement is to confront the threat of climate change head on, we must organise ourselves not only as students, but also as workers, willing to use direct action to demand revolutionary change. We have a lot of work to do to get to this point, and writing letters to MPs isn't getting us any closer. If we are to build an organised, militant, working class climate movement, we need to start from the ground up – there are no shortcuts to revolution.

Yet if there is so much work to be done, why do we see the same issues, the same protests, the same squabbles every year, while we seem to slip further away from a liveable future? As students and climate activists, we must refocus our efforts and remind ourselves who our friends are, and where our power truly lies.

No friends in the boardrooms, no friends in parliament

Climate change is an urgent and existential threat forced upon working people by the capitalist class. The vast scale of the issue leads many people to focus primarily on top-level solutions to generate large-scale changes, like shifting the levers of state power or influencing private capital.

This is a strategy which disempowers working people, who lobbyists assume can do nothing for themselves except politely ask institutions and corporations to be better, while waiting always for the endless election cycle and a new set of decision-makers. This strategy ignores the fact that the economy which it is trying to gradually change is an economy controlled by capitalists, and maintained by government elites on their behalf. Just as we will not find allies in global summits or corporate boardrooms, neither will we find them in our parliaments and party rooms.

Even Labor and the Greens should be held at arm's length, as their power derives only from the mass movements that they purport to represent. At best, progressive politicians are offered illusory and temporary power to tweak unfavourable policies. At worst, parliamentarians actively sap the life from powerful social and workers' movements, and implement harmful reforms in the name of 'electability'. If we are to build a fighting movement, we must focus our energies at the ground-level, where true power can be built through striking and protest, ignoring the false promise of electoral reform.

We must ask ourselves: how do we build a united, grassroots movement that can resist not only the capitalist class, but the liberal politicians who seek to co-opt and pacify our resistance?

Student workers, working students – where does our power come from?

The answer relies on a clear-eyed view of where our power for direct, collective action comes from. If we are serious about driving change from below, we must realise that only workers have the power to create the drastic change we need to resolve the climate crisis.

Workers are those who are required to sell their labour to the wealthy for a living. It is workers who make society run, and it is the very same people who can withdraw their labour and grind the economy to a halt if they so desire. If only we were well-organised and willing to fight, workers could demand the world.

But many students tend not to think of themselves as workers, despite often filling the most

exploitative casual jobs during their studies. Ultimately, unless you are swanning around the colleges on family money, you must sell your labour to pay rent and buy groceries, and so you are a worker.

This is no temporary reality either – no casualised pitstop before eventually entering the 'real world' of professional work! As workers, and workers in training, it is up to us to realise our status, and the collective power it offers, and organise ourselves as such. Whether in our workplaces or on our campuses, we should always organise with the intention of spreading class consciousness and building solidarity, through direct action and collective struggle.

Worker power and climate action

To turn the latent power of the working class into the real, fighting strength of organised labour, we must start with the realisation that organising in our workplace for better conditions has a direct impact on the strength of the climate movement, and all other surrounding social movements.

We must also realise the scale required to drive serious climate action. It will take nothing less than mass strikes for us to secure a fair and urgent transition to a zero-emissions economy. It will not be achieved by electing a neoliberal Labor government, or convincing a few companies to shift their profits. It will require workers in key manufacturing and energy industries to make difficult collective decisions on what projects they work on, what kind of world they want to build. It will require workers everywhere to place real industrial pressure on the economy to force top-level change.

> "Many students tend not to think of themselves as workers, despite often filling the most exploitative casual jobs during their studies."

Fortunately, we're not starting from a blank slate. Australia has a rich history of hugely successful rank-and-file union action on major issues, from the push for Aboriginal land rights during the Wave Hill walk off, to the fight against corporate urban development with the BLF's Green Bans of the 1970s. The historic success of these movements came from the solidarity and tenacity shown by many sections of the working class supporting each other through brutal oppression from the state and bosses.

But the modern climate movement is no BLF; we have seen no Wave Hill. The labour movement has been in decline for several decades, with severe anti-union legislation such as the Accords (implemented with the support of the union bureaucracy) blocking rank-and-file workers' inherent right to strike. This has resulted in a massive drop in industrial disputes: in 1987, 1311 working days were lost through industrial action, while a mere 33 days were lost in 2020.

It is imperative that we stand up to these laws directly, as the right to strike is something which no government can take from us. There is a long way to go before we can do this, however, as we are blocked by our governments, our bosses, and even our own union bureaucrats. Yet recently we have seen glimpses of potential.

Over ten thousand teachers walked off the job late last year, despite an Industrial Relations Committee order blocking the strike, while rail workers continue their strong industrial action in the face of ongoing legal and political pressure from the NSW Government. Nurses and other health workers defied a similar IRC order in February, walking off the job in their thousands to protest unsafe ratios and poor pay.

Casualised industries have also seen an uptick in union activity, with the efforts of militant unionists in organisations like RAFFWU inspiring solidarity across the retail and hospitality sectors, and casual university staff agitating successfully within the NTEU for better demands in current EBA negotiations, including industry-firsts like transition leave. The CFMMEU's Willow Grove 'green ban' last year was also the first in decades, in a powerful showing of union solidarity with the Parramatta community.

Students are an active part of these struggles: as future teachers and nurses, we are relying on current strikes to secure good conditions for when we enter the workforce, and almost all students rely on casualised industries for work during their time at University. We must realise that students are not fighting their own, separate battle; we are directly involved in the union struggles that could reignite the workers movement in Sydney. Our actions building support for strikes, joining picket lines where possible, and organising our own workplaces can inspire other workers to take direct action themselves.

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While organising as workers, we should also continue to build power in our student unions. It is here where students currently have the most capacity to fight for issues like climate justice; even during pandemic lockdowns and police repression, students have been able to mobilise in their thousands for climate strikes.

This capacity to mobilise around broader issues is why students are positioned so uniquely in the modern left - our efforts can help build connections between seemingly disconnected struggles, to create a truly powerful working class movement for climate justice.

So, as we build strength in our workplaces and student associations, we plant the seeds of genuine climate action. Organised workers create active unions; active unions could build climate justice committees; these committees can build links between workers across industries, and ensure material demands are won at work and incorporated into the broader climate movement. With strong, material demands at the forefront of the movement, students and workers will be in the best position to inspire mass direct action for climate justice.

This is why union organising is so important, especially for students in casualised industries. Direct action trains us to demand more, and gives real power to the social movements students are so actively involved in. It also teaches us to imagine and participate in the building of a new world entirely, one built on solidarity and cooperation, rather than profit and exploitation.

A world to save – a world to win

Ultimately, if we do not forge a path to zero emissions ourselves, then we will bear the brunt of mass ecological destruction. If we do not forge a path to a just transition directly, then our position will be further weakened by the precarity that comes with the privatising market logic of the elites.

But if we remember where our power lies, we can take hold of it to demand more than just piecemeal improvements and meagre reforms. We can demand a better world, built on solidarity, equality, and respect for humanity and our environment. If we are willing to fight for it, we might just win it.

In the words of Spanish revolutionary hero and anarcho-syndicalist militant Buenaventura Durutti:

“It is we who built these palaces and cities... We, the workers. We can build others to take their place. And better ones. We are not in the least afraid of ruins...

“The bourgeoisie might blast and ruin its own world before it leaves the stage of history. ***We carry a new world here, in our hearts. That world is growing in this minute.”***

Little Real Estate Tenants Unite - Housing is a Human Right

Action in solidarity with QLD renters.

Black Flag Sydney stands with the South East Queensland Union of Renters (SEQUR) in their "Little Real Estate Big Mistake" campaign. Their struggle to reduce exploitation and to better the living conditions of their tenants is an important one.

Little Real Estate, like many other landlord-supporting businesses, has been mismanaging tenants' homes and displacing them during the pandemic. For example, one of the tenants of Little Real Estate's homes was made to live over 3 months in a hotel due to renovation delays to the bathroom. It was originally planned to be 2 weeks. This not only caused mental stress but also significant financial cost for which they haven't received compensation.

Furthermore, we recognise that the problems aren't just with any one real estate agent but are inherent to how housing is structured under capitalism. Landlords expropriate wealth from the working class by withholding access to housing; they are inherently parasitic and unnecessary to society. Housing is a need and shouldn't be a commodity.

The development of tenant unions like SEQUR is a necessary form of organisation for working people to fight back against landlords. Given the floods ravaging Queensland and NSW due to climate change, as well as the housing affordability crisis, collective struggles for better housing will become more and more important in the future.

This means fighting each time a landlord like this tries to exact a pound of flesh from a tenant, but also uniting and fighting so that no landlord ever can. We demand that Little Real Estate not only compensate the tenant in full, but we further demand that the Queensland and NSW governments take the following measures during this crisis: automatic rent waivers for any unlivable home, halt all evictions for at least the next year, freeze all rent increases, double the disaster payments and roll them out to all in need, and begin a program of constructing more than fifty thousand new publicly owned and run houses (a number which would only just meet the current demand for public housing in NSW alone). These measures would stop people from being forced into poverty and homelessness, and help resolve the housing crisis affecting working class communities across the country.

Shame on Little Real Estate for treating tenants so horribly. Shame on the government for creating the conditions that allow scum like Little Real Estate to get away with it. And solidarity with SEQUR in their struggle against it!

Against carceral feminism: Advocating for working women's freedom without the police

A statement of resistance for International Working Women's Day.

Women's work is not just 'undervalued' in our society, it is exploited.

Industries that are dominated by women workers are highly casualised and drastically underpaid. It is no coincidence that the professions that received huge burdens throughout the covid pandemic - aged care & disability support workers, nurses, school teachers, & early childhood educators - have suffered a suppression of wages while the profits of corporations continued to go up. Both nurses and school teachers engaged in very public strikes over the past 6 months. This is the state of feminised labour in Australian society: essential and yet under assault by exploiters and the state. A vast amount of care work is not paid at all, such as the invisible labour that women perform every day that keeps our society afloat.

To be liberated from care work should be the aim of feminism. This is only achieved through working women's collective resistance. This is why it's important that all unionists stand in solidarity with the nurses and school teachers on strike, but also why it's important for these fights to extend to early childhood education, disability support, and aged care, where wages are disgustingly low and there is minimal career progression. There may be campaigns for pay increases in these sectors, but they will not win unless the muscle and appetite to strike and fight is built. It is through these campaigns for equal pay that we should also raise the demand for these essential services to be free, publicly owned and run, and widely accessible.

"To be liberated from care work should be the aim of feminism. This is only achieved through working women's collective resistance."

This material deprivation of women, the deliberate exploitation of care work, whether paid or unpaid, upholds the structure of our society. It allows practices like coercive control to flourish. Women in the home absorb the burden whenever essential services do not exist or are held in private hands, and economic inequality makes it harder to speak out against domestic and sexual violence in the home or at work. If survivors, the majority of whom are women, are to speak out, we need to guarantee income by an increase to wages and welfare, provide paid domestic violence leave for all, and roll out social services. Otherwise, power and material imbalances allow male perpetrators of domestic and sexual violence to continue to exploit this situation.

We need a society that provides the full material welfare women require - for all situations, including escaping sexual or domestic violence.

Some liberal feminists pursue criminalisation as a way to seek justice for these women. We believe this is misguided. The justice system is no friend to survivors, with threats of defamation for speaking out and few convictions for perpetrators. Meanwhile, women's prisons are filled with survivors of domestic violence. There is no indication that further empowering the police will do anything except relocate the underlying problem to prisons. Empowering the police also means empowering them to continue other forms of oppression they commit against women. Police still oppress the labour of sex workers in states where all of or some forms of sex

work are still criminalised, while some councils hire investigators to effectively sexually assult sex workers in order to gather 'evidence'. Police use their powers to harass trans women, and lock them in men's prisons. Poor women are also oppressed by the police, especially in states where women are jailed for non payment of fines. Even when it comes to allegedly arresting men who commit sexual assault, very often if a woman has acted in self defense against him, the police will prosecute and jail that woman for committing assault, particularly if the woman is First Nations.

> "If survivors, the majority of whom are women, are to speak out, we need to guarantee income by an increase to wages and welfare, provide paid domestic violence leave for all, and roll out social services."

Illustration by @hollie.moly on Instagram

Our task instead should be the abolition of the legal codes that harm women and all survivors. This means ending the defamation laws that silence us when we speak out about the violence done to us. This means fully decriminalising sex work in every state, including for street sex workers and migrant sex workers. This means ending mutual obligations that cut women off welfare, and the practice of imprisoning people on remand or for non payment of fines. This means removing the restrictions on whistleblowing that restricts healthworkers from coming forward when refugees are raped. This ultimately means abolishing the prison system - beginning with women's prisons, juvenile detention, and refugee detention centres.

We don't need police or prisons to bring about women's liberation. Women's liberation must come from the resistance of working women themselves, to determine their own lives outside of the control of any husband, boss, or cop.

"We anarchists do not want to emancipate the people; we want the people to emancipate themselves."

Errico Malatesta

BLACK FLAG SYDNEY